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ABSTRACT

Across Canada almost 40 percent of youth drop out and do not finish high school. Young people feel they can drop out of school and find a job tomorrow that will pay them enough so they can continue the lifestyle to which they are accustomed. However, unemployment rates for individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 are high. There are people who are concerned about Canadian youth and willing to act on the problem. In 1986 Youth Employment Skills (YES) Canada, Inc. was begun by business leaders, based on a youth serving organization called the 70001 Employment and Training Institute. The mandate of YES states that it is a national, non-profit organization whose purpose is to integrate young people into the workforce through a program of learning and motivation. Five components of the YES program include academic upgrading, pre-employment training, life/survival skills, job development, and motivation. YES participants are experiencing success as they take high school equivalency and college entrance exams. They obtain new jobs because of better interviewing skills and more confidence. An effective movement has begun to help young people change their lives so that they can become part of a vibrant, creative Canada. (ABL)

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YES Canada - A Solution For Students at Risk

[Allen Croxall]

The story is one that has been heard over and over again. A young girl in high school was tired of school. It just didn't interest her. She believed that the courses she had to study didn't make any sense. Her best escape was to drop out and she did that with ease, it is as if no one seemed to care. Once she was out of school she roamed the streets of Halifax looking for the bright future she thought was there. All she found was more anguish. She wasn't able to get a job because she had neither experience nor a high school diploma.

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One evening she was listening to a local Rock Station and she heard a message of hope. She went to the place described and entered a program that gave her a second chance. She found a program that allowed her to be successful at her own pace; she didn't have to keep up with the rest of the class. After three months she graduated from YES Canada and entered a Business College. She is considering going to University next year.

The education and youth employment landscapes are littered with young people who feel forgotten, defeated or even abandoned. This generation appears to have lost the courage to dream new and exciting dreams for itself. Young people seem to be going through life aimlessly without any

planning for the future. Many young people have chosen to be apathetic about their plight. The response is an easy one, just drop out of society and merely exist rather than live life to the full with all its challenges and excitement.

Our culture has taught these young people to expect the best, to strive for all the good things that are available in life and to try to grab the brass ring that always seems to be just a little out of reach. We have a generation of young people that has become so oriented to the media that they spend their time believing the Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous are theirs for the taking because they deserve it. The illusions that are portrayed on television and in the movies are sought as a replacement for reality. The

journey is like searching for the Holy Grail; it never ends and it demands all their energy and ambition.

The statistics are frightening, across Canada almost forty per cent of young people in grade nine will not finish high school. In his report on youth in Ontario, Ken Dryden confirms these figures for Ontario and he goes on to say that in Ontario over 76% of grade nine students will dropout before they finish grade 13. Billions of dollars are being pumped into education each year and the dropout figures continue to be staggering.

Young people feel that they can drop out of school and pick up a job tomorrow that will pay them enough salary so

they can continue living the lifestyle they are accustomed to. Unemployment figures from Statistics Canada for October 1987 indicate that the unemployment rates across Canada for 15-24 is 12.4%. In the city of Halifax 51,600 young people 15-24 years of age were out of work. In the St. Catharines/Niagara area the number is 59,200, while in Winnipeg 106,800 young people were out of work. Vancouver has 212,700 unemployed 15-24 year olds.

At first the picture seems gloomy, almost dark. Whatever happened to the vitality, creativity and imagination of youth? When did their enthusiasm die? Is there anything that can be done to reawaken a generation to its potential? The answer to all these questions is very

complex. However, there is a common thread that runs through these questions; **is there any hope for these young people?** There are many who still have hope, the flame has not been extinguished. It is still flickering.

There are people who are concerned about Canadian youth. There are some who are willing to act on the problem.

The Governor General of Canada, the Honourable Jeanne Sauve, has youth as one of her major concerns and to emphasize this concern she met for lunch with representatives of the Canadian business community in 1985. With sincere concern for the plight of unemployed youth she said,

Bring your acquired management skills to the
resolution of this very grave problem. Our
responsibility to the future is far greater than we
realize. If that future is to be one of promise and
prosperity, it is essential that we inspire our youth
now with the task of building on that which we have
accomplished: That we guide them through example as
well as rhetoric in a spirit of compassion, tolerance
and humanity.

In a luncheon speech before the Empire Club, The Loyalist Societies and the Canadian Club of Toronto on November 12, 1985, the Governor General continued to address her concern for the position that youth have taken in our society. She mentioned that while technology allowed them to live a lifestyle their parents would have never have dreamed of, "they have had to pay a heavy price". There have been changes in the family structure and the social fabric that often leave the young people defenceless. They are unable to cope with the demands of society and yet they are struggling for independence to prove themselves. Young people feel alienated from a fast paced, often impersonal society. Through all this despair young people are trying "to satisfy

two very strong and universal needs of mankind ... put in the very simplest of terms, they are the need to feel you belong ... and secondly, the need to become something, to realize some potential as a contributing member of the society to which you belong."

The appeal struck a chord with two businessmen in the audience. After the luncheon these gentlemen continued to discuss how they could help youth help themselves. The need was great and the response had to be innovative and creative so that it could help untangle complex problems with simple responses.

With financial assistance from the Innovations branch of the Canadian Job Strategies YES Canada was born in June 1986. The acronym YES stands for Youth Employment Skills Canada Inc. The model was predicated on a Washington based, national youth serving organization called the 70001 Employment and Training Institute. This organization has been in the field of Youth training for over seventeen years and has helped over 70,000 young people get off the welfare roles and get back to work, education or training.

Many adjustments were made to its orientation and content so that it could fit into the mandate that was given to YES Canada. The company was to set up pilot sites of the

YES Canada model in the four English speaking regions of Canada and this was to be accomplished by the end of May 1987. Much program development had to occur before the sites could be implemented.

The private sector Board of Directors determined the mandate and the Mission Statement for the Company, it reads:

YES Canada is a national, non-profit organization whose purpose is to integrate young people into the workforce through a program of learning and motivation.

These business leaders acknowledge that the only way we can compete in the world of tomorrow is to radically improve the way we train our young people to enter the workforce today - especially those who have tried and failed.

To accomplish the mission, a new model of youth training had to be devised and implemented. The YES Canada model incorporates five components which prepare young Canadians for the mainstream of society: **Academic Upgrading, Pre-employment Training, Life/Survival Skills, Job Development** and a strong **Motivational Component**.

The Academic Component utilizes a Computer Managed Learning system called the Comprehensive Competencies Program that was purchased from the Remediation and Training Institute in Washington, D.C. The development of the CCP is financially supported by the Ford Foundation. It is an individualized self-paced, competency-based Mastery Learning system with a wide array of learning materials for students in need of remediation. In YES Canada's case we have certified teachers on staff in all our sites.

The site staff have noted many areas that need improvement in the CCP system so that it can better fit the needs of Canadian educators and students. YES Canada is

presently creating a new sequential learning system that will improve the various identified problem areas in the CCP and develop new computerized management and recordkeeping systems.

The present system allows students to proceed at their own pace to master objectives that run the gamut from letter and number recognition through GED preparation and College Entrance requirements.

After a student is diagnosed by standardized testing and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is drawn up, the young person can track his/her progress through subject mastery tests in the system. Through pre and post tests the

student is able to determine his/ her level of proficiency reached in the various subject areas.

The one-on-one tutoring accompanying the various learning materials has caused many of YES Canada's Associates to experience success in learning perhaps for the first time in their lives. The learners experience a strong sense of well being as they gradually increase their learning and ultimately their market value in the workforce.

Our young people are obtaining grade gains in the Academic Component that were never possible for them in the traditional school system.

In the last analysis that has been run on 254 records,
the following information has been discovered:

18.5% of Associates have less than grade 8 upon

entry

69.7% of Associates have grade 10 or less

Average actual grade gain in Reading is 1.37 grades

Average actual grade gain in Mathematics is 1.8

grades

78% of Associates achieved some academic benchmark

while in the program

Our Associates have on the average 52.82 hours in

the Learning system while in the Cycle

The Functional Module is composed of Pre-employment Training, Survival Skills and the Motivational Component.

Pre-employment Training is centered around various job skills these include Job Seeking, Job Getting, Job Keeping, Job Changing and inter/intra personal skills. These skills are presented through a strong Curriculum that has been designed and modified to suit the various regions where we have sites yet still reflecting a standard National Model. Through various methods of Instruction including role playing, lecture style instruction, movies, guest speakers and various group activities, the young people discover and practise new skills in seeking employment.

The Survival Skills Component provides youth with the opportunity to acquire practical skills that will assist them in their life situations. In this component, the young people are involved in various areas including Government and Law, Health and Safety, Consumer Affairs, Community Resources, and Personal Skills. This component offers a wide range of topics that touch young people's lives including Birth control, AIDS, and healthy eating habits to name just a few. By the time the 12 week program has been completed, the young people learn how to cope with the problems that occur during day to day living. These subject areas are taught in ways that reflect varied learning styles using many types of resources including guest speakers, tours,

projects, classroom work, etc. Our youth have the opportunity to provide input regarding the topics that interest them. These topics are used as electives that accompany the required topics in the Survival Skills Curriculum. One of the strengths of this component is the hands on approach that is used to reinforce the learning. The varied activities, many organized by the youth, become learning experiences that are rich sources of information about survival in today's society.

The Motivational Component is pivotal to the success of the YES Canada program. It incorporates an Award system, certificates, positive affirmation, and YESCA, the YES Canada Career Association. Each of our sites establishes a

YESCA chapter complete with an executive council comprised of our Associates. The chapter plans activities for the whole group which allow for an experiential approach to specific Survival Skills objectives. The input given by the young people in the program is taken very seriously and they jealously guard the activities and social events they plan.

YESCA is part of the Motivational Component but it is not all of it. Motivation takes place under many forms in the YES Canada model. Throughout the day a young person is given positive reinforcement in all the components and especially through the interaction with staff and other Associates. The Motivational Component allows for a powerful bonding to take place amongst the Associates of a given 12

week cycle. The young people feel like they belong to something.

In the YES Canada site in St. Catharines, Ontario, the site Manager was surprised to find the excitement that the membership cards provided. He had given an exhaustive presentation about YESCA and he thought it wasn't going anywhere and then he gave out the Membership cards with their names typed on them, the young people were so excited they started yelling and cheering and after signing their cards they carefully placed them in their wallets.

They have somewhere to go and be themselves. Through weekly advisement sessions the young people receive

assistance rediscovering and redeveloping their strengths as well as identifying and controlling their weaknesses. The Motivational Component is a ribbon that is wrapped around all the boxes that make up the YES Canada model. It is the source of strength as well as a strong social element in the Model.

The Job Development Component exists throughout the twelve week cycle but it moves into prominence during week six. The Co-ordinator in charge of this component is responsible for marketing the program to the community as well as assisting job-ready Associates for interviews with possible employers. Throughout the program, Job Development seeks to help integrate our Associates into the workforce.

After the young people have left our program and have either obtained a job or returned to education or training, the Employment Co-ordinator will track the Associate's progress for at least 90 days. This allows us to help the Associate adjust to the work world or school and sometimes it allows us to act as a mediator in disagreements.

The YES Canada model is a very tightly knit program that seeks to help young people help themselves. The program does not provide a subsidy for either the young people in the program or the companies that hire them.

YES Canada strives to meet the young people where they are at and they are attracted to the program by

advertisements on Rock Stations or in newspapers. Last summer two Associates were hired by YES Canada to go into the marketplace to find possible Associates. These two Associates went into the poolhalls, the Arcades and anywhere else young people hang out to attract them to the program.

Many Associates come from referrals by Social Workers, Parole Officers, Homes of Detention, parents and grandparents. The source of referrals seems endless.

A strong National office with a staff of Specialists continue to develop and refine the Model so that there is a solid national program from coast to coast. All staff members at YES Canada receive a thorough training in program

specifics as well as the chance to constantly upgrade their skills through Professional Development programs given by National Program Specialists and other experts in the Education and Youth Programming fields.

The active support of many top Canadian business people at the Board level give strong credence to the tenets that underpin our program development. Business people are telling us to give them young people with strong Basic Skills and a good attitude and they will perform the job specific training. YES Canada has provided the opportunity for over 400 young people to make great strides in changing their own lives.

They are experiencing success as they write High School equivalency and college entrance exams. Associates successfully obtain new jobs because they have better job interviewing skills and more confidence thanks to our Pre-employment Training and Motivational component. Lives are changing as people trapped in the welfare maze find jobs and self-fulfillment for the first time.

An effective movement has begun to help young people change their lives so that they can become part of a vibrant, creative Canada.

Many young people in this country are at risk, there are groups that are trying to help them. YES Canada is a National organization that is a solution for Students at Risk.